

*“You have heard it said”: script, counterscript*  
*Luke 10:21-24; John 14:19-23; Colossians 1:15-17, 25-29, 3:1-4*  
*From Leviticus to the Gospels, from Prescription to Revelation*

There are scripts in the world about what the Bible is and isn't. One of these scripts that's fairly prominent and has likely influenced many, if not all of us, teaches that the Bible was written by God ages and ages ago. Or perhaps more precisely, God spoke to men and they recorded the words for the benefit of all people in all ages.

This script also teaches that the reason God gave us the Bible is so that we would know how to live. The history and stories, the laws and parables are all for the purpose of creating boundaries and limits for what we can and cannot do, what we *should* and should not do. And when we live within these boundaries, we will be God's people. We will be saved. We will have fulfilled God's intention for us.

This understanding says that *Scripture* is *prescription*. Like a medical doctor, God has written a prescription for us within the Bible. And when we “take it,” or follow it, just like medical prescriptions, we will be good and healthy Christians. All we have to do is read and follow the instructions that God has prescribed for us.

But unlike doctors' prescriptions that are written for particular people with particular conditions, and are limited for only so many refills or for limited time, this understanding of the Bible says that God's prescription was written thousands of years ago and it's instructions and dosage are the same for everybody in every time and in every context.

When we understand the Bible to be God's prescription for us, like drug prescriptions, we read the Bible literally. The Bible “means what it says.” We take it at face value. It doesn't need interpretation. Our experiences don't matter and shouldn't be taken into account. All we have to do is read it, or have it read to us, and we'll understand and know what to do.

And we'll be good.

These scripts rely on our ability to read and understand and follow instructions. This understanding requires little or no creative participation on our part—we're mostly passive—simply doing what God says. This script doesn't require us to pay much attention to what's going on around us. If we're doing what God prescribed, then it's unfortunate that there are thousands of migrants seeking refuge. While it may be unfortunate, it isn't our problem. We're doing what we're supposed to do and that's our main concern.

This helps explain, at least to me, how it is that so many people who call themselves Christian seem so indifferent to the plight of those who are victims of violence and oppression.

When we read the Bible as prescription, God is the authority and we are simply the recipients and obey-ers of his authority.

The focus of this kind of reading is on God. We're reading for what the Bible says about God and for God's instructions for how we're to live, how to have faith and be faithful, and how to worship. In other words, the Bible is theological.

But Jesus offers another way of understanding Scripture. Jesus says, "Come and see." He doesn't say, "Come and read." Or, "Come and understand." Instead, Jesus says, "Come and see.... Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!"

With these words, a counterscript begins to be revealed.

One of the ways we talk about Jesus is to say that he is the Word of God. As Christians, by faith we claim that God's Word is made-flesh in Jesus. In other words, Scripture is written onto the very human body and being of Jesus of Nazareth.

If this is true—and our faith claims that it *is* true—if this is true, the implications for how we understand the Bible are huge! Rather than being prescription that is written once and for all time, with the birth of Jesus, we begin to *see* that God's Word is alive, a living

thing. When we “come and see,” what begins to be revealed is that in Jesus, God’s Word was written in a particular historical place and time.

And we know from listening to Jesus that the incarnation isn’t just for Jesus, the Son of Humanity, but for all human beings. For all particular places and times. It’s possible for his disciples and for us to give flesh and blood to God’s Word. This is Jesus’ invitation. He doesn’t prescribe but invites us to “Come and see...and participate!”

Rather than a prescription that never expires, God’s Word is being written through time, in every place, in every human. This is what is possible. This, Jesus shows us, is our potential as human beings. It’s an open invitation

But there’s something else that the incarnation reveals. Come and see....

What we now begin to see is that Scripture isn’t just theological, it is also anthropological. It’s about human beings. When we follow Jesus, when we go with him we see that Jesus isn’t just revealing God to his disciples and the people he encounters and engages, Jesus is also revealing people to themselves. He’s revealing our humanity to us. In this counterscript that’s coming into focus, instead of understanding the Bible as a one-way communication from God to human beings, telling us *what to do*, we start to see that Scripture is also about who we *are*.

So instead of seeing Cain and Abel, or Abraham and Sarah, or Judas or Peter or Mary Magdalene as historical characters, we begin to see them as ourselves. We see our story in their story. We see our rivalry and murderous spirit in Cain. We see our chosen-ness in Sarah and Abraham. We see our acts of betrayal in Judas. Our love for Jesus in Mary.

When we go with Jesus, we’re given eyes to see. And with this new seeing, when we read the Book of Numbers or other hard passages in the Bible, instead of the question, “How

could God have done that or said that?” we are given a new question, “What does this Scripture reveal about ourselves?”

In addition to seeing Jesus as God’s Word-made-flesh, our faith also claims that Jesus is God, that Jesus reveals God. So when Jesus says, “Come and see,” we are keeping our eyes open for the fullness of God to be revealed. The full revelation of God is made visible—made *see-able*—in Jesus. Every step of our journey following Jesus reveals more and more of who God is...and who we are.

This is why we begin in the Resurrection Garden. We get glimpses of a merciful and gracious and loving and forgiving God in each of Jesus’ encounters with people. But it isn’t until Jesus rises up from death that we begin to get a sense of the absolute aliveness and light and life of God. This is what Jesus reveals. This is what resurrection makes visible.

And once we have seen this, when we hear passages in the Bible assigning violence and sacrifice and death to God, we now have eyes to see that this is not God’s violence, it is our violence being revealed. Violence is sneaky. It is so much a part of our world and our religion that too often, when it happens, we assign it to God, assuming divine violence, redemptive violence. But the resurrection reveals that there is no violence in God. God is deathless; there is no death in God. God is utter aliveness, light, and life.

When we follow Jesus, our eyes are able to see things that we weren’t able to see before. What was invisible begins to be visible. What was hidden is uncovered.

Once Jesus has opened our eyes, we can’t help but see! And we see and hear things in new ways, ways we couldn’t have imagined. When Jesus opens our eyes, we get a glimpse of the utter aliveness and light and life of God. And our imagination is transformed. Our imagination is turned upside-down and inside-out, and we have new eyes to see and new

ears to hear Scripture, in ever-changing ways. We discover that as revelation grows, so our seeing and hearing and understanding grows.

Let me give several examples:

Jesus tells a parable about talents, about a man who gives money to each of his servants and then goes away. When he returns, the first two servants come to their boss saying they've doubled his investment. They're praised for their faithfulness and ingenuity. The third servant comes and says, "I know who you are so I buried the money. Here it is."

The Bible-as-prescription understanding of this parable is that we shouldn't bury our talents. That god, the boss, wants us to invest and multiply what he's given us. Investing and multiplying our money (or gifts or resources) is good; burying them is bad. This seems like a simple, straightforward reading, right?

But when I was in Palestine I heard another reading (and I'm sure many of you have heard this as well): The boss in the parable doesn't represent God but represents the oppressor, Rome, the State. And burying the money is an act of resistance against injustice and oppression. By burying the money, the third servant refuses to have anything to do with the oppressor, refuses to participate in systemic oppression.

Our context has everything to do with our seeing and understanding of Scripture. There isn't a "literal" reading of the Bible. We *always* see and read through revelation and within the context of our lives and the world around us. It's part of what makes Scripture so powerful and enduring. We've only to look around us to know that the Bible can be used to maintain the status quo, to keep the foot of oppression on the backs of refugees, the poor, and on black and brown bodies.

A second example is how we see Mary and understand the virgin birth. There's a script that says Mary's virginity is important so that Jesus wouldn't be contaminated by something

as profane and vulgar as sex. In this script, her virginity is about moral and sexual purity. The implication of this script, of course, is to shame us for our sexuality. Such a script denies that God's creation of human beings is good. And it denies that Jesus, the Son of God, was also the Son of Humanity, the Human One.

But from the Resurrection Garden, having seen the utter aliveness and light and life of God, we see something new being revealed. Mary's virginity has everything to do with protesting and resisting systems of death. Her virginity is about life and liberation and power for the powerless, the poor, the vulnerable. As a virgin, the oppressive cultural and religious and patriarchal systems had no claim on her, on her body, or on her child. And because Mary was a virgin, Jesus' identity could not and would not be bound by the expectations or privileges of lineage and power and place.

The virgin birth doesn't separate Jesus from the rest of humanity, rather, it reveals a new way that we can be human. Like Jesus, we too can be born of God, God who is utterly alive.

We human beings are not meant to continue the cycles of rivalry and violence and death that we see repeated again and again in Scripture. When we go with Jesus, we *see* that we are meant for utter aliveness and light and life. We are meant to live fearlessly, as though death is not.

May God's utter aliveness and light and life infuse us. May God's aliveness and light and life flow through us and into the world around us.